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W^m Morris
A
1753.

LETTER
FROM AN
OLD MERCHANT
TO
HIS SON.



DUBLIN:
Printed by GEORGE FAULKNER in Essex-street.
MDCCCLIII.

11. Nov. 1852



Advertisement.

I Need not tell the intelligent Reader of the following Letter, that he who writ it, is a Man of sound Sense and Piety; nor need I make any Apology for publishing it. These Things it will do itself. It may be proper, however, to let the World know, that as the Father is a Merchant, so his Son is Master of a Ship; and that, while the former is known among his Friends for a Man of great Judgment, and considering his Business, of uncommon Learning; that the latter every Day distinguishes himself by such Works of Genius, as astonish all who know, he had little other Education, than what he got on board a Ship; which, from his Childhood, was almost his only House and School. The Printer can tell their Names.

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THE
OLD MERCHANT'S Letter.

MY DEAR SON,

MY Glas is near, perhaps will be quite run, before you receive this, the last Advice of your Father. If it has not on you the Effect I desire, and earnestly pray for, it will, however, clear me on that Head, at the great Day of Accounts.

You know, the World, in low Life, is strangely corrupted with Idleness, Lying, Filching, and Obscenity; in high, with Pride, Oppression, Luxury, Flattery, Treachery, and other Vices, so abominable, that even the Heathen Notions of Virtue could not bear them; and therefore produced Laws to suppress them. But, as one of their own Authors says, they could neither endure their own Vices, nor the Remedy applied to them.

WHAT, however, do Laws avail, without Religion? Laws cannot be executed without Oaths, nor the Truth of Oaths depended on, without Religion; that is, without a firm Belief in a Supreme Being, and a future State of Rewards and Punishments. It is plain, therefore, the World cannot be ruled, without GOD, consequently there must be Truth in Religion, because GOD could not have made a World to be governed by Imposture.

Socrates,

Socrates, Plato, Cicero, Sir Isaac Newton, and all the true Philosophers, have seen and proved Design in the Maker, by the Force of natural Reason. All Legislators have seen and proved the Necessity of Religion, from moral Reason. But neither natural, nor moral Reason, have given that Testimony to Religion, that divine Revelation hath done. This Revelation was attested by a long Succession of Miracles, wrought in *Egypt*, the most knowing Nation; and among the *Israelites*, the most incredulous Nation of the World.

THE Memory of these wonderful Facts was kept up by Records, Laws, and Institutions, ceremonial and judicial, all intermixed in the sacred Writings of this latter People, whereby, during the Subsistence of their Constitution, they were always rewarded or punished. A Series of Prophets kept up their Attention to these Things, more especially to their

Sacrifices, which were Types of the great Sacrifice, till our Saviour came to offer it up. The written Memorials of these Things, the *Jews* yet preserve with the greatest Care, though they contain a standing Testimony against themselves.

THE Birth, Actions, Miracles, Death, and Resurrection of CHRIST, were foretold by the Prophets, and recorded by Witnesses, who, most of them, died for the Truth of their Records. What they set forth, will appear as convincing, as it is surprising, if you read with Attention, and consider the great Things done, the Doctrine taught, the Majesty and Plainness of the Narration, the Miracles performed to prove the Truth of our Religion, and the wonderful Progress it made, which could be owing to nothing but those Miracles; for it did not flatter the Superstitions or Vices of Men; but condemned all other Religions, and taught those who received it to deny themselves, to cut off their Hands, and pluck out
their

their own Eyes, rather than to submit to Corruption through the one, or employ the other in Sin. It taught them, in short, to despise this World, and look for another ; and yet it prospered.

Now observe, my Son, that this Religion was preached in that great City, and at that very Time, where and when the Facts appealed to, were done in the Sight both of the *Romans* and *Jews*, preached, I say, and recorded in Writings, which must have been then and there both contradicted and refuted, had not those Facts been real. The believing *Jews* must have been strangely credulous to believe all this, if they had not seen the Facts ; the most stupid, to think they had seen them, if they had not ; the most impudent in appealing to others for the Truth of them, if those others had not also seen them ; and the most foolish in renouncing the Pleasures of this Life, and embracing all its Miseries, Poverty, Banishment, Torture, Death, if their Hopes had not been founded

founded on the highest Conviction. The same may be said of the *Gentile* Converts, who were *Greeks* and *Romans*, Bigots to Philosophy, to Pleasure, to worldly Interest, and to Paganism. Yet among these the Gospel made a swift and wonderful Progress, in Opposition to all the Terrors of such Persecutions as the World had never heard of before.

Now, the End for which all this was done, is plain, namely, to bring Life and Immortality to light; that is, to introduce a Motive to Reformation of sufficient Power, and through Reformation, to make the World happy. Consider, my Son, that Life compared to Eternity, is as a Point to an infinite Line. Consider, likewise, that Vice, which our own Reason condemns, (for to be vicious ourselves, and to live with the vicious only, is Hell) must be still more hateful to the pure and holy GOD. Yet the World, before it was taught better Things by Christianity, knew little or nothing of GOD; and
less

less of a future Being. It neither knew how Wickedness was to be reformed, or attoned. All this our great Instructor came to discover, to open an unclouded Prospect of Eternity; to offer up a sufficient Sacrifice for Sin; to introduce us to that Life of Purity here, which is to be perfected hereafter; and by his Precepts, his Institutions, his Examples, his Grace, to give us that Strength and Perseverance, which Nature, corrupt and weak, denies.

You will ask, perhaps, why this Doctrine did not more universally prevail? and another may as well ask, why it prevailed as it did? The well disposed were prepared to receive it; the ill disposed, to reject it. Men are free to receive, or reject. Hence it is, that Christianity must maintain its Ground to the End of the World, because there will always be some well disposed; and that it must be always deserted, betrayed, or persecuted, because there will always be a Majority of Mortals of an opposite Turn.

Socrates

Socrates was put to death at *Athens* for opposing Error, as well as *CHRIST* and his Disciples at *Jerusalem*, and elsewhere Virtue suffers, and must, while the World lasts, suffer a like Martyrdom of its Principles, where-ever Vice hath gained the Ascendant. As the best Men are not entirely free from vicious Inclinations, so even in them, Faith sometimes staggers, so that as well the Teacher, as the taught, frequently give Signs of Infidelity.

BUT the Subject swells. I have thought, my dear Son, long and much on these Matters, but have not made the Progress I ought. However, as you have thought less on them, let me beseech you to hear the Call of your Father, so far at least, as to give Religion a fair Hearing. If the Advice of a Father can rouse you; if your own Reason in balancing the present with future Things, if the Terrors of a final Judgement can alarm you; let
me,

me, I conjure you, by him who made, who governs, and will judge, us all, prevail on you to think, to examine, to search the Works and Word of GOD; for if you do, I know, you will fear GOD, you will love him with all your Heart, your Soul, your Strength; you will make his Will the Rule of your Actions; and in so doing, will be happy. Make haste. Old Customs are not easily laid aside, nor new ones acquired. I know your Weaknesses and Habits. The Reasons must be very striking, and the Motives strong, that enable you to hate Things loved, and to love Things hated. Be resolute therefore, that you may be quick in beginning, and constant in persevering. Call daily on GOD at home, and in his House; and feed your Piety at his Table. Have him always before your Eyes, and in your Heart. This will render you just to other Men, humble and contented in yourself, a Contemner of Praise, and yet a sincere endeavourer to do every Thing that may deserve it.

This

This will give you a Power over your Appetites, and procure you a calm, healthful, and probably, a long Life. These, and better Fruits, will it bring with it at present. But when your Life draws near a close, which, on the longest Allowance of Days, must be soon, this will deliver you from unspeakable Horrors, no otherwise to be avoided; and fill you with Hopes in Death, infinitely preferable to all the sensual Pleasures of Life.

By this long Letter you may understand the Fears of a Father for you, who desires nothing from you, but the Hopes of your own Happiness, who advises you from grey Hairs and Experience, and briefly hints a few Reasons out of many, leaving it to your own Judgment to trace out more. Your Happiness cannot depend on the deceitful Smiles or Promises of the Great, who often need the Advice I have given to you; nor on Riches, which add nothing to him who hath the Necessaries of Life, but Vanity, Vexation, Wanton-

Wantonness, Visitants, Flatterers, Servants, Horses, Dogs, and other Consumers of Time, Money, and Innocence; nor doth it depend on Applause, the nauseous Breath of Folly or ill Designs; nor on impure Pleasures, of which the Times smell so strong, that we seem to live among Swine and Goats, rather than Men; but on him who gave you Being, and who alone can give you the Comforts of that Being; on a GOD of Purity and Holiness, whose Eyes cannot behold Iniquity. It is, indeed, my Son, a fearful Thing to fall into the Hands of this GOD, for who may stand in his Sight? If the righteous will scarcely be saved, where shall the wicked appear?

BE not particular in your Dress, Air, or Behaviour, no more than in your Principles. That which is general and ordinary, hath the best Chance to be right, before Things are tried by the Touchstone of Reason, which gives no Countenance to Singularity, merely such. When
you

you go into Company, be not assuming; be not first to give your Opinion, nor positive. In all disputed Cases, (if you are at all concerned) be on the honest Side, and be calm and steady. It often happens both Sides are in the wrong; if you keep yourself cool, you will see it, and may reap great Advantages from it. Let not the Atheist, the Deist, or the Libertine, whether in Principle or Practice, be among your Intimates. If sometimes you are obliged to meet them over a Bottle, guard against that and them, with a like Abhorrence to Intoxication. If they offer to declaim for their Principles, you may venture surely to despise them, as heartily, as they do yours. If they are moral Men, answer them; if vicious, laugh at them. Contemn alike the Fop of Opinions and Dress. Consort with Men of Sense and Virtue, and you will be a Man of Sense and Virtue. Give due Respect to your Superiors, and require little of those beneath you, unless in Matters of Command. Be courteous to all Men;
and

and believe me, Praise is seldom given, but for the Benefit of him who gives it. Know yourself therefore, and distrust it. Howsoever true it may be, as soon as you are dead, it will equally belong to the Dust of a dead Horse, and yours. Help the unhappy to the uttermost of your Power: But give not to the Idler, for you were not made to be his Drudge; nor to the Drunkard, for he hath no Right to Subsistence, who aims at Excess; nor to the Thief, who does but steal when he begs, nor to the Lewd, lest you turn Pimp to his detestable Vice.

READ History and natural Philosophy at your leisure Hours, that you may know GOD and Man by their Works. Read the *Old Whole Duty of Man*, that you may know, and govern yourself. Above all read the Scriptures, in which GOD speaks in Wisdom to your Understanding, and in Power to your Passions. Read the Prophet *Isaiab*, and compare him with the History of CHRIST, that you may see

the Conformity between the divine Foreknowledge, and the Facts in which we are so deeply concerned. Read the *Proverbs*, that you may abound with the Maxims of true Wisdom, and have them ready on all Occasions. Read the *Psalms*, that your Heart may be warmed with true Devotion, when you pray to, or praise GOD. Let the New Testament be ever in your Hands, that you may know, and well consider, on what Terms Salvation is promised. Some Revelation must have been made, because the World must have sat in religious Darkeness without it. If any was ever made, it must have been the Christian, for no other Religion, pretending to divine Authority, hath either the inward, or outward Marks of Genuineness, to convince us. Is not our Happiness always future? Do we not either hope for it, or fear to miss it? Why were the Hopes of Happiness, and Dread of Misery, given us, unless to fix our Eyes on real, but future Happiness and Misery? Consider, my Son, can the
Things

Things of this Life make us either happy or miserable? No, they cannot fill the Mind. Look therefore forward to Things that can; and do Christianity the Justice to own, that it alone gives you well-grounded Assurances of either.

Be not carried away, my Son, from these necessary Reflections, nor induced to doubt the Force of such Reasonings, neither by your own corrupt Inclinations, which always vote against Religion, nor by those of other Men. Be not an Unbeliever, because the great or the ingenious are Unbelievers. Nor be wicked on Principle, for Vice is the worst of Errors, and does the greatest Dishonour to the Understanding of Man. Neither suffer the Vices of such among the Clergy, as preach one Thing, and practice another, to betray you into Disbelief, for your Faith depends not in what they say or do. They are but Men like yourself; many of them more ignorant than you, and not a few of them worse disposed by Nature. Religion

gion groans under their Vices more than it did under the Persecutions of its open Enemies; but in the Eyes of the judicious cannot be answerable for the Practices of such Intruders. It needs not their Virtue to prove it true; nor fears, their Vices should prove it false. It is highly slavish to follow them. You may have as good Reasons for going to Heaven as the best of them; and surely you can have none for going the contrary Way, from the worst of them. Fix your Attention, therefore, on your own eternal Interest, and be guided by the Word of G O D, without suffering yourself to be beat out of your Path, by Travellers that cross your Way in Pursuit of contrary Ends, be they rendered never so considerable by Function, Fortune, Station, or Understanding. Reject not Revelation, my Son, because it speaks to you of sublime and mysterious Things. It could not speak to you of G O D, without doing this. Think not highly of your own Understanding, for it is but little you can know.

know. You know not your own Soul, nor Body, nor any Thing else. If you understand not these Things that are so familiar and intimate, how shall you aim at a perfect Knowledge of him by whom all Things exist. He could be no **GOD** that you could comprehend, which you are infinitely farther from being able to do, than the Mouse that gnaws your mouldy Provisions is, from comprehending how your Ship was built, or how you steer it through the Ocean.

Do NOT imagine I write this to display my Knowledge, or to amuse you. Consider, I am writing to my Son, to discharge my Conscience, and admonish him whose Happiness is not less dear to me than my own. All Things here are determined to particular Ends. The Life and Being of **Man** hath its peculiar End, which few know, and fewer live as if they did. I wish all Men knew it, and feelingly considered it: Know it, O my dear Son, to be this, that thou shouldst
worship

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worship the Lord thy **GOD**, and him only serve, according to the Reason he hath given thee, and the Declarations of his Will, laid before thee. If thou shalt follow these, thou shalt please him, and be happy. A contrary Course must have a contrary End. May the Spirit of Truth guide you into all Truth. May the good God bless you. Pray for him who prays for you, and is with Fears and Hopes, unknown, but to the Heart of a Parent, ever tenderly and anxiously

Your **FATHER.**

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The END.

